

Introduction

Now what? We've all asked that question haven't we? It's usually when we're confronted with some fact or facts that require a good sense response from us. Today is the fifth and final Sunday in our "Celebrate Jesus Month." In the last four sermons I've preached, I've confronted us with the facts about Jesus. They are, among other things, that He is the best, smartest, most competent, and only divine person who ever lived. But now what? That's the question. What is the good sense response that those facts require from us? Turn to Luke 14:25-33 and we'll see.

Discipleship to Jesus Defined

The subject matter of this text is found in a word that's used in verses 26, 27, and 33, "**disciple**." If repetition reflects significance, "**disciple**" is a significant word. That word and its plural, "**disciples**", are used 269 times in the New Testament. It's safe to say that the New Testament is a book about disciples by disciples and for disciples.

Now, the exhortations "**come to me**" in verse 26 and "**come after me**" in verse 27 help us define what a disciple is. It's an apprentice. It's someone who spends time with a person in order to be and do what that person is and does. Just this past week, I met a young woman named Courtney who was with the Becker Funeral Home team. I asked her if she was a new staff member and she replied, "**No, I'm an apprentice**." Think about what she is doing. She is with the Becker staff members in order to become and act like them in providing funeral services to people. She's an apprentice.

There are many kinds of apprentices. People can be apprentices to attorneys, surgeons, bricklayers, welders, electricians, teachers, or Jesus. That's right. I said "**Jesus**." That is in fact to what the word "**disciple**" in the New Testament refers. It's an apprentice of Jesus. It's one who is with Him in order to become like Him and to do all that He says. "**Disciple**" was the word of Jesus' choice to define what our

relationship to Him should be.

Two Mistakes about Discipleship to Jesus

But even though it was, many Christians don't understand what disciples are. They make two grave mistakes in that regard.

One is to distinguish disciples from Christians. A book widely used by evangelical churches illustrates what I mean. It's *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* by Leroy Eims. In it, Eims presents living the Christian life on three possible levels: the convert, the disciple, and the worker. He also describes the process for bringing persons from one level to the next. Notice his premise. People can become converts or Christians and not become disciples.

That we can do that is the majority view today. But it's wrong. The New Testament makes it clear. Discipleship to Jesus isn't optional as navigational systems or sunroofs are in cars. It's necessary instead as steering wheels and engines are. We don't become Christians and then disciples if we decide to. We become both at once because they're the same thing. Disciples in fact coined the term "**Christian**" and applied it to themselves (Acts 11:26). The New Testament makes no distinction between Christians and disciples.

Many Christians make a second grave mistake, which follows from the first. They equate disciples with spiritual maturity. To them, disciples are ones who have been following Jesus for years and are advanced in their relationship with Him and in righteousness. I met a man who decided to follow Jesus six months before and was struggling with using four-letter words and other bodily habits of evil. Most would say he wasn't a disciple. But they're wrong. He was one as surely as Billy Graham was. The fact is that a person can be a rough around the edges spiritually and still be a disciple. That's because discipleship to Jesus is about decision, as we'll see, not spiritually mature condition. All true disciples eventually become spiritually mature, but none were that when they became ones.

It's true then. First, there is no distinction between disciples and Christians. And second, spiritual maturity is a consequence of discipleship not a prerequisite for it. What that implies is profound. "**Disciple**" is the fundamental relationship with Jesus that saves us as the New Testament defines "**saves.**"

Because it is, let's become one. We can and Jesus Himself teaches us how in our text. According to Him, it takes three things.

What Discipleship to Jesus Takes – Confidence

The first is implied in the exhortations "**come to Me**" in verse 26 and "**come after me**" in verse 27. Identify who it is that people choose to follow and from whom they choose to learn. It's those in whom they have confidence, and that's where discipleship to Jesus begins. We have confidence in Him, which means two things.

First, we believe He is a real-life personality. Consider two terms. One is "**the Historical Jesus.**" That's what most mainline denomination scholars and members perceive Him to be. He's merely an historical figure whose words and life are worth admiring, but that's all. The other term is one that the first Quakers coined, "**the Present Teacher.**" That's what they perceived Him to be - real, alive, and personal. He engages us and can be engaged by us. Those are two beliefs and they're contrasts. If we believe that Jesus is only historical, we can't have confidence in Him. If we believe that He's present as well, we can.

To have confidence in Jesus means a second thing. We believe that He is the greatest and the best – that He was and is utterly good and great, perfect and infinite in character and competence. And because we believe that, we know it's safe and even best to become what He is and to do what He says.

That then is one thing it takes to become disciples of Jesus, confidence in Him. We believe that He's a real-life personality and that He's the greatest and the best. If we don't, we can't apprentice ourselves to Him. It's psychologically impossible. If we do, we can.

We can't just choose to believe those two things and immediately believe them. But we can choose to understand, which then allows the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of belief. So, let's understand. Let's study the Bible and other sources and learn all that we can about Jesus. What I've preached about the last four weeks is an excellent place to start.

What Discipleship to Jesus Requires - Clarity

There's a second thing it takes to become disciples of Jesus – clarity. In verses 28-32, Jesus observes that one who wants to build a tower and one who wants to fight a battle count the cost before they do. They do that by determining the gain and loss of building the tower and fighting the battle. The moral of those two stories is what counting the cost of something does. It gives people clarity. It enables them to see the value of doing or possessing that something.

According to Jesus, in verse 33, that something includes becoming disciples of His. He exhorts us here to count the cost before we do. Determine the gain and loss of becoming disciples of His. We'll have clarity if we do. We'll see the value of becoming that. Since that's what He exhorts us to do, let's do it.

First, we determine the loss. There is loss to be sure as He Himself declares it. In verse 27, He calls the ones to whom He is speaking to take up their own crosses and in verse 33, to leave their possessions behind and travel with Him where He goes. He's saying in both verses that there is a price to be paid for becoming disciples of His.

In his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified generally what that price is. It's to forfeit some things that are normally sought in human life. When I began practicing law years ago, the going rate was \$75 an hour and 33% contingency. Almost all attorneys charged that. But because I was a disciple of Jesus, I let Him decide how much I charged, which was less than that. I forfeited what attorneys normally seek, which is to make as much money as they can. People want to run their own lives and do what they want to do. But

disciples of Jesus let Him run their lives and do what He wants them to do. They routinely forfeit things, as a result, that others normally seek.

Now that we know what we lose in becoming disciples of Jesus, let's determine what we gain. There is one thing that sane people desire and seek most. It's the condition of life that Jesus describes as **"abundant"** in John 10:10. Dallas Willard defines that condition of life this way. It's **"abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout with love, faith that sees everything in light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging circumstances, and power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil."** Or to say it another way, it's a life in which love, peace, and joy routinely prevail. That's the one thing that sane people desire and seek most. And the good news is that all of us can have it, but only if we become disciples of Jesus.

We have now counted the cost of becoming disciples of Jesus and have clarity as a result. We grasp the truth that He Himself teaches in verse 26. If we don't hate our siblings, parents, children, and spouses, we can't be His disciples. That statement of His disturbs anyone who doesn't understand it. A young mother once told me, **"If I have to hate my husband and sons to follow Jesus, then I'm not going to."** But that isn't what He means. As He Himself taught, we should love our families not hate them. This verse isn't about misery. It's about clarity. Anyone who thoughtfully counts the cost will see this – the superiority of being a disciple of Jesus over literally everything else in life, including what people consider most valuable, relationships with family members who love us. To particularize it, **"Disciple of Jesus"** is more valuable than **"Husband of Jill"** or **"People Magazines' Most Beautiful Woman"** or **"Mayor of New York"** or **"Forbes Billionaire,"** and so on.

Counting the cost makes us realize something. Discipleship to Jesus is the single greatest bargain in human life. Wal-Mart sells a 70 inch flat screen television for \$1,600. It's spectacular. But suppose the manager of a local store offers to sell you one for \$1.60. Now that's a bargain.

But neither it nor any other bargain that's possible on earth comes close to the bargain of discipleship to Jesus. The gain of it so far outweighs the loss that there's no comparison. Anyone who objectively and thoroughly counts the cost has clarity and sees that.

What Discipleship to Jesus Requires – Choice

Having clarity is a spur. Let's go back to that \$1600 television for \$1.60. How many of you would choose to buy it? How many of you would buy it regretfully? None of you. How many of you would buy it joyfully? All of you. That illustrates what comes out of clarity about a bargain. It's decisiveness and joy, and that's the third thing that it takes to become disciples of Jesus – joyful choice. That really is the crux of the matter. Why do we buy \$1600 television sets for \$1.60, or become disciples of Jesus. It's because we joyfully and thus firmly choose to.

And with regard to Jesus, it's the most radical choice we ever make. Going back to our definition of an apprentice, we make the decision to be with Him in order to become like Him and do all that He says. We then systematically and progressively arrange all of our affairs around carrying out that decision.

We can't do that on our own of course. We need the instruction and strength that fellowship with other apprentices gives us, which is the purpose of the apprenticeship groups we're forming. So, join one.

Conclusion

I close this sermon and our *Celebrate Jesus Month* with a thought. Christians often talk about the high cost of discipleship to Jesus and how difficult it is. But consider this – the high cost of non-discipleship and how difficult it is. The cost is forfeiting what people desire and seek the most – prevailing love, peace, and joy. The difficulty is the strain that forfeiting that puts on life. In contrast, the cost of discipleship to Jesus, in terms of gain and loss, is low. It is, in other words, the greatest bargain in human life. That's a fact. Now what?